

FOREMOST INDIGENOUS OF ASSAM: FROM SPECIAL SOURCES

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ABSTRACT

Though Bodos are ignored and suppressed by different majority people of Assam in India, yet the Bodos are the first indigenous community of Assam.

KEYWORDS: *Foremost-Aboriginal, Indigenous, Tribal, Traditional, Infiltration, Dynasty, Mongolian, Kachari, Mech, Bodo, Rabha, Tiwa, Mising, Miri & Hajong*

Received: Jan 26, 2022; **Accepted:** Feb 16, 2022; **Published:** Mar 19, 2022; **Paper Id.:** IJHRJUN20229

1. INTRODUCTION

A great controversial matter is going on presently in the state of Assam (India) i.e. the word *indigenous*. Who are the indigenous? –The study would like to identify them from different communities. Now a day, in that particular state, each community people try to establish themselves as the aboriginal people of the locality. Who are actually the real indigenous people of the state? What kind are cleared and focused? This is the aim of the article.

2. METHODOLOGY

The data are collected from both primary and secondary sources for the study. The primary data are collected from original copies of books and using personal interviews as well. The secondary data and information are collected from library books, e-library, journals, criticism, e-books and websites etc.

3. IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

Presently, different community people would like to establish themselves as foremost original people or community; but in real sense, the Bodos are the foremost aboriginal community. So, the study is highly needed.

4. THE GOAL OF THE STUDY

The word “*indigenous/aboriginal*” is a controversial matter among the people of Assam, so the study likes to clear the current controversial issue.

5. INDIGENOUS

- “Originating or occurring naturally in a particular place, such people are called indigenous. Indigenous peoples are the holders of unique languages, knowledge systems and beliefs and possess invaluable knowledge of practices for the sustainable management of natural resources. They have a special relation to and use of their traditional land.”¹ “Indigenous” describes any group of people native to a specific region. Indigenous comes from the Latin word *indigena*, which means “*sprung from the land; native*”.

¹. <https://www.google.com/search?q=indigenous+meaning&oq=&aqs=chrome.0.69i59i450.12021985j0j15&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8>, 19/10/2021

Therefore, using “Indigenous” over “Aboriginal” reinforces land claims and encourages territory acknowledgments, a practice that links Indigenous Peoples to their land and respects their claims over it.

- The term '*indigenous*' derives from the late Latin '*indigenus*' and '*indigena*' (native) and from the Old Latin '*indu*' that is derived from the archaic '*endo*' (a cognate of the Greek '*endo*'), meaning '*in, within*' and the Latin '*gignere*' meaning '*to beget*', from the root '*gene*' meaning '*to produce, give birth, beget*'.²

It refers to people who lived there before colonists or settlers arrived; defined new borders, and began to occupy the land. Native, Aboriginal, Local, Original, Earliest, First, Initial, Ancient; all these words are related to Indigenous words in English. It was produced, grew, lived, or occurred natively or naturally in a particular region or environment. Presently, all the related meaning for Assamese language is used *Khilonjiya* (খিলঞ্জিয়া), for Bodo *Thagubwi/Thagibi* (থাগুবুই/থাগিবি). Besides this, in Assamese *Bhumi-Putra* (ভূমি-পুত্র) is also used, it means *Son of Land* in English.

6. EXTENSIVE DISCUSSION

6.1. Infiltration of the Austroasiatic Peoples in Assam

- “Austroasiatic, The earliest known inhabitants of Assam were **late neolithic Austroasiatic peoples** who came from Southeast Asia. Genetic studies on O2a1-M95Y-chromosomal haplogroup, associated with Austroasiatic speakers in India, show that they reached northeast India about five thousand years ago.”³ “The Austroasiatic remnants today are represented by the Khasi and Pnar peoples in neighboring Meghalaya; and who are also present in Assam's Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao districts that adjoin Meghalaya.”⁴ Presently, they have Meghalaya state in India, it is clear as per mentioned here.
- “As regarded the origin of the Khasis as well as the Jaintias a few theories have been adduced. Sir Edward Gait has, in fact, made no distinction between the Khasis and the Jaintias or Syntengs. Gait believes that the Khasis which belong to the Mon-Khmer linguistic family were one of those hordes of Mongolian people who entered into North-East India first and established themselves in their present habitat at a very remote period.”⁵

Though history says the **Austroasiatic peoples** are the foremost indigenous of Assam, now they have originally established in the state of Meghalaya into the Indian geographical area. Some of them have remained in Assam also. Co-equally, the Bodos have also been living along with them as per history mentioned. They have got nothing separate state till date in India.

6.2. Infiltration of the Bodos in Assam

- “Protohistoric Assam is reconstructed from epics and literature from early times (Mahabharata, Kalika Purana, Yogini Tantra, diff. chronicles etc.). The earliest political entity seems to have been led by a non-Aryan Danava dynasty with Mahiranga mentioned as the first king. This dynasty was removed by Narakasura. Naraka appears to be a generic name for many kings belonging to the Naraka dynasty. According to legend, the

². https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indigenous_language, 18/10/2021

³. <https://www.google.com/search?q=First+indigenous+of+Assam&aq=First+indigenous+of+Assam&aqs=chrome,69i57.13176j0j15&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8>, 05/12/2021

⁴. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/People_of_Assam#Austroasiatic, 05/12/2021

⁵. Bordoloi, B.N., Tribes Of Assam, Part-III, First Edition, January 1991, p.61; Gait, E., A History Of Assam, Third Edition, Guwahati, 1984, p.259

last of the Naraka kings was killed by Krishna and his son Bhagadatta took the throne. Bhagadatta is said to have participated in the Mahabharata war with an army of "*chinas, kiratas and dwellers of the eastern sea*", thereby indicating that his kingdom, Pragjyotisha, included part of Bangladesh. The last in the Naraka dynasty was a ruler named Suparua.⁶ So, it is clear that Mahiranga was a Mongolian people. Such as Narakasura and Bhagadatta have also become kings of the Naraka dynasty in the following days. They were also non-Aryan people. Pragjyotisha is the earlier name of Kamarupa or Kamrup.

- Danava(Hinduism) Name of a race descending from Daksha. They were the sons of Danu, who in turn was a daughter of Daksha. Danu is connected with the waters of heavens and she is probably associated with the formless, primordial waters that existed prior to the creation.⁷ The *Danava* meaning is accepted in a bad or negative sense presently, but from the angle of this sentence, the Danavas are related with the creator genetically i.e. goddess of water.
- "Bodo Tribe of Assam- is known to be the earliest settlers of Assam and the first to cultivate rice and rear silkworms. The Bodos are considered to be the largest ethnic and linguistic group of the Brahmaputra valley and they reside in the north-western parts of Assam."⁸ From this quotation, it becomes clear that the Bodos were the ethnically and linguistically largest in Assam.
- The archaeological surveys indicate the fact that the earliest human communities that appeared in the land of Assam were Australoids and Mongoloids, known as Kiratas, the Mongoloids were believed to have ruled the entire state of Assam through their capital in Pragjyotishpura. This capital was later found mention in the pages of history by the name of Kamrupa.⁹ It is clear that (already has mentioned) Austroloids have settled at Meghalaya state, but some are persisted in Assam also.
- "The fact, therefore, that excluding immigrants during historic times, a few communities, like Kalitas, of reputed Aryan descent, and a few others, such as the Doms of obvious Dravidian origin, the bulk of the population of the Brahmaputra valley is comprised of tribes whose peculiar dialects belong to the Tibeto-Burman branch of the Indo-Chinese family by no means indicates racial uniformity."¹⁰ It is clear from the snippet, that ethnic people like Kalitas and Doms were colonized in Assam from other states of India. They are not indigen people before Indo-Chinese or Mongolian people in Assam.
- From the opposite corner of India, through Assam and the eastern Himalayas, there was a similar influx of tribes of Mongolian origin, whose main physical characteristics are a short head, a broad nose, a flat and comparatively hairless face, a short but muscular figure and a yellow skin. In Assam (excluding the Surma valley) and North-East Bengal, the Dravidian type has to a great extent been replaced by the Mongolian, while in the Surma valley and the rest of Bengal a mixture of races has taken place in which the recognizable Mongolian element diminishes towards the west and disappears altogether before Bihar is reached."¹¹ As per mentioned by Sir Edward Gait, the Mongolian people spread over the Assam, Eastern Himalayas, North-East Bengal in the preceding thousands of

⁶. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Assam#Colonial_Assam_\(1826%E2%80%931947\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Assam#Colonial_Assam_(1826%E2%80%931947)) 19/10/2021

⁷. <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/Danava> 19/10/2021

⁸. <https://www.adb.org › files › 47101-001-ind-ippf.pdf> 18/10/2021

⁹. <https://www.mapsofindia.com/assam/history.html> 19/10/2021

¹⁰. Gait, Sir Edward, A History Of Assam, 4th. Indian Reprint 2008, p.2

¹¹. Ibid., p.4

years. The author has given priority to the Mongolians are the first settler in those geographical areas.

- “The history of the arrival into India of the various Mongoloid groups speaking of Sino-Tibetan speech-family is not known, nor have all the various languages and dialects in the family been satisfactorily classified. It would appear that their presence in India was noted by the 10th century B.C., when the *Vada* books were compiled. The composite Hindu (i.e., Austric-Dravidian-Aryan, or Indo-Gangetic) civilization reached the Mongoloid peoples of Northern and North-Eastern mountains and plains from about that date.”¹² The reputed author, Suniti Kumar Chatterji has surmised the Mongolians have been living into North-East India and neighbor states as well as countries since 10th centuries B.C., at that moment the *Vada* books were compiled.
- “The Kachari Raja thereupon removed his court to Maibong (much paddy), Where the dynasty would seem to have maintained itself for some two countries. Finally, however, under the pressure of an attack by the Jaintia Raja the Kachari sovereign withdrew from Maibong to Khaspur in Kachar (circa 1750 A.D.). There they seem to have come more and more under Hindu influence, until about 1790 the Raja of that period, Krishna Chandra, and his brother Govinda Chandra made a public profession of Brahmanism. They were both placed for a time inside the body of a large copper image of a cow, and on emerging dance were declared by the Brahmins to be Hindus of the Kshatriya caste, Bhima of Mahabharata fame being assigned to them as a mythological ancestor. Hence to this day the *Darrang Kacharis* sometimes speak of themselves as ‘*Bhim-ni-fisa*’ i.e. children of Bhim, though as a rule, they seem to attach little or no value to this highly imaginative ancestry.”¹³ From this viewpoint, the Mongolians may also be said as the Kshatriya caste.
- “The reign of the last Kachari king, Gobind Chandra was little better than one continuous flight from one place to place through the constant attacks of the Burmese, who finally compelled the unhappy monarch to take refuge in the adjoining British district of Sylhet. He was, indeed, reinstated in power by the aid of the East India Company’s troops in 1826, but was murdered some four years later, when his kingdom became part of the British dominions. His commander-in-chief, one Tula Ram was allowed to remain in possession of a portion of the subdivision now known as North Cachar, a region shown in old maps of Assam as ‘*Tula Ram Senapati’s country*’. But on the death of this chieftain in 1854, this remaining portion of the old Kachari Raja was formally annexed to the district of Nowgong.”¹⁴ From this standpoint, it can surmise that Kachari kings reigned first in Assam, but they could not form their kingdom strongly and bravely in later eras.
- “Looking back at the history, we find that the Kacharis had a long standing enmity with the Ahoms. In the year 1536 A.D., the Ahoms occupied Dimapur, the capital town of the Kacharis and had driven away the Kachari king and his royalty. Having fled away from Dimapur, the Kacharis established their capital in Maibong in the North Cachar Hills. But here also the Kacharis could not live in peace. While the most powerful Ahom king Rudrasingh was on the throne of Assam, the Kachari king Tamradhaj had the courage of proclaiming his sovereignty in the year 1706 A.D. This had infuriated the Ahom king who had dispatched two contingents of the Ahom armies to Maibang, the capital of the Kachari king. The Ahom armies crushed the Kacharis and even their capital Maibang

¹². Chatterji, Suniti Kumar, KIRATA JANA KRITI, Revised Second Edition, Second Reprint in November, 2007, pp.15-16

¹³. Endle, Rev. Sidney, The Kacharis (Bodo), Reprint 1990, 1997, pp.6-7

¹⁴. Ibid.,p.7

was not only occupied by the Ahom armies but demolished also. The then Kachari king Tamradhaj had to flee for his life and to take refuge along with his nobles and other followers in Khaspur, in the plains of Cachar.”¹⁵ From this instance of history, it is easy to the supposition that the Kacharis had ruled in Assam before Ahom came.

- “Gait regards the Kacharis as the origin aborigines or earliest known inhabitants of the Brahmaputra Valley. According to him the Kacharis are identical with the people called Mech in Goalpara and North Bengal.”¹⁶ B.N. Bordoloi has commented that the Kacharis and the Meches are the same Mongolian ethnical people. They are the origin autochthon of the Brahmaputra Valley i.e. Assam.

6.3. Infiltration of the Koch Rajbongshi in Assam

- “The history of Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khiliji’s invasion at the end of the twelfth century says that the features of ‘the Koch, Mech and Tharu tribes’ resembled those of a tribe of Southern Siberia. That acute observer Bryan Hodgson classed the Koch with the Bodo and Dhimal, and the same view is taken by Buchanan and in the *Dacca Blue Book*.”¹⁷ Bryan Hodgson and Buchanan have observed that Koch, Mech and Tharu are the same tribe. The authors classed the Koch with the Bodo and Dhimal i.e. Mongolian origin.
- “The progenitor of the Koch kings was a Mech or Koch— it is not certain which— named Hariya Mandal, a resident of Chikangram, a village in the Khuntaghat Pargana of the Goalpara district. He was recognized head of twelve leading families of Meches (or Koches) living in the Pargana.”¹⁸ Sir Edward Gait also says that the Koch king, Hariya Mandal was a Mech or Koch, it is not cleared yet. So, it can be guesswork; both the ethnics were the same origin.
- “In 1891, a section of these Koches who were at tribal or semi-tribal stage in present North Bengal and Western Assam tried to dissociate themselves from their original ethnic stock by describing themselves as Rajbanshi or Vratya Kshatriya.”¹⁹ Presently, it is seen that the Koches have fractioned having taken another name i.e. Rajbangshi. Ultimately, they are mutable; seldom changed their identity.
- “The Koches appear to have been originally a Bodo tribe, closely allied to the Meches and Kacharis, but many of them now present the physical characteristics of the Dravidian family.”²⁰ The excerpt has conveyed that the Koches are previously conglomerated to Meches or Kacharis.
- “The Brahmans encouraged them in their patronage of Hindu deities like *Siva, Durga and Vishnu* and of Sanskrit learning. Even Visva Simha, the first Koch monarch, was said to have a divine origin, as the son of *Siva* himself. Thus rising in the social ladder, thanks to what in modern terminology is called ‘Sanskritization’, the Koches shed off their old tribal name and assumed a more *vaunted* appellation *Rajbangshis*.”²¹ H.K. Barpujari has also given his clarification that Koches are promoted themselves into Rajbangshis.

¹⁵. Bordoloi, B.N., Tribes Of Assam, Part-II, First Edition, March 1998. P.1

¹⁶. Bordoloi, B. N., Tribes Of Assam, Part-III, First Edition, January 1991, p.81; Gait, E., A History Of Assam (Reprint), Guwahati, 1984, p.247

¹⁷. Gait, Sir Edward, A History Of Assam, Reprint in EBH Publishers (India) 2008, 2010, 2012,2013, p.47

¹⁸. Ibid., p.49

¹⁹. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rajbongshi_people 16/12/2021

²⁰. Gait, Sir Edward, A History Of Assam, 4th. Indian Reprint 2008, p.2

²¹. Barpujari, H. K., The Comprehensive History Of Assam, Volume-II, Third Edition: August 2007, p.70

6.4. Infiltration of the Kalitas in Assam

- “According to historians like S.L.Barua, Kalitas started migrating from North and East India to Assam during the 11th century rule of Dharmapal.”²² The mentioned source has distinctly clarified that the Kalitas have cruised to the Assam. They are not sons of Assam land (অসমৰ ভূমি-পুত্ৰ) but they are cruisers during the 11th century.
- “কলিতা জাতিৰ মানুহ অসমৰ চাবেক অধিবাসী নহয়। ব্ৰাহ্মণসকলৰ দৰে তেওঁলোকো পশ্চিমৰ মিথিলা, কনৌজ আদি ঠাইৰ পৰা আহিছিল। অসম চৰকাৰৰ বুৰঞ্জী-বিভাগৰ পৰা প্ৰকাশিত হোৱা ‘কামৰূপৰ বুৰঞ্জী’ত পশ্চিম দেশৰ পৰা অহা কলিতা-পণ্ডিতৰ উল্লেখ আছে।”²³

English Rendering

The Kalitas are not ancient people of Assam. They are also migrated from the places of West-Mithila, Konouj etc. like the Brahmans. The Kalita Pundits had come from the western country, it is mentioned in ‘Kamrupor Buronji’ that published by the History Department of Assam Government.

- “এই উদ্ধৃত বাক্যৱলীত উল্লিখিত গোৰৰ ধৰ্মপাল বঙ্গ-বিহাৰৰ প্ৰসিদ্ধ পালবংশী বৌদ্ধমতাবলম্বী ৰজা। গোৰৰ পালবংশী ৰজাসকলে খ্ৰী: ৭৩০-১১২৭ শতাব্দীৰ ভিতৰতৰাজত্ব কৰে। পালবংশৰ প্ৰথম ৰজা গোপাল প্ৰজাসকলৰ দ্বাৰা নিৰ্বাচিত হৈছিল। ধৰ্মপাল সেই বংশৰেই দ্বিতীয় ৰজা। তেওঁৰ ৰাজত্ব আৰম্ভ হয় খ্ৰী: ৮০০ শতাব্দীৰ পৰা। তেওঁ অসম জয় কৰিবলৈ অহা নাছিল। পালবংশৰ তৃতীয় ৰজা দেবপালৰ সেনাপতি লাউসেন বা লৱসেনে অসম জয় কৰে খ্ৰ: নৱম শতাব্দীত।”²⁴

English Rendering

It is mentioned that Dharmapal was a king of Gaur from the Pal dynasty as well as he is a noble Buddhist. The Pal dynasty reigned in Assam around 730-1197 A.D. Gopal is the first king of the Pal dynasty; he was elected by the laymen. Dharmapal was the second king of the dynasty. He had reigned from 800 A.D. He did not come for the purpose of winning the Assam. The chief warrior of the third king Debapal named Lawsen or Lowosen had conquest the Assam in the Ninth century.

Historian says that the Kalitas of Assam are the next followers ethnic of the Pal dynasty. Hence, it is clear that the Kalitas are not an original inhabitants of Assam. They are inhabitants of Assam but after the historic period of Assam had begun. The original inhabitants like Austroasiatic, Mongolian (Mech, Kachari, Bodo, Rabha, Tiwa, Mising, Miri, Hajong etc.) are the aboriginal ethnic people of pre-history period of Assam.

7. CONCLUSION AND FINDINGS

Having watched the above viewpoints, it can be surmised that Austroasiatics, Mongolians (Mech, Kachari, Bodo, Rabha, Tiwa, Mishong, Miri, Hajong etc.), Koch-Rajbongshis, Kalitas as well as Pal ethnic group and Brahmans are all the native dwellers of Assam. Among them, Austroasiatics were the first indigenous of Assam but they have separated from Assam, they have created Meghalaya state. After them, the Mongolians like Bodo, Mech, Kachari, Rabha, Tiwa, Mishong, Miri, Hajong etc. are the foremost indigenous people of Assam. They are still living in Assam without intermingling with other developed ethnic groups of people. They still have their own culture, language, folk habits as well as literature. The following ethnic group of people in Assam is Koch-Rajbongshis. But some apparent authors have commented that they are allied to the Meches and Kacharis. They tried to convert and uplift their personality without keeping their own originality. It is right that their intelligence quotient (IQ) has developed having changed their originality but their culture, language and

²². [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kalita_\(caste\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kalita_(caste)), 06/12/2021

²³. Kakati, Banikanta, KALITAJATIRITIBRITA, First Edition, 2014, pp.9-10

²⁴. Ibid., p.10

rituals are decayed in the following days. The Kalitas and the Brahmans are the last indigenous people of Assam. They have already developed IQ before reimbursement to the Assam. In the eve of conclusion, of the present concern, it can convey that the Bodos are the granted foremost indigenous people of Assam with their gorgeous culture, language, customs, rituals, religion, folk songs and dances etc. in Assam. The remaining ethnic people are also indigenous but not foremost indigenous. So, they cannot be utilized as the son of Assam land i.e. *Bhumi-Putra of Assam* (অসমৰ ভূমি পুত্ৰ) in Assamese word, (आसाम हानि फिसा) in Bodo word. They are indigenous *Khilonjiya* (খিলজিয়া) for useable Assamese word and *Thagubwi/Thagibi* (থাগুৰী/থাগিবি) for useable Bodo word.

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